

THE STUDY OF MAN

WHAT WESTERN COLONIALISM GAVE TO ASIA

The Record as Seen from the East

HERBERT LUETHY

IN K. M. Panikkar's own words, his book is "perhaps the first attempt by an Asian student to see and understand European activities in Asia for 450 years." I would add that it is also the first attempt to see them as a whole, without polemical or apologetic intent. Not only has no other Asian writer ventured upon such a synthesis: no European one has either. There is indeed a steadily growing literature on colonial history and politics, an abundance of monographs and large standard works by men better trained in historical analysis and more familiar with the source materials than Panikkar. He, a historian, statesman, and diplomat, has a rather sketchy grounding in many fields and is not always reliable as to details, being more of a judge and critic than a chronicler. But his true originality and value lie elsewhere.

THE recent Bandung Conference has drawn increased attention to the effort of the newly independent Asian countries to find solutions for their multifarious problems that will not limit their supposed freedom of maneuver in international relations. More responsible than anything else for Asian sensitivity in this respect is the large fact of the imperialist past. How an Asian thinker views that past is most illuminatingly and seriously revealed in *Asia and Western Dominance*, by K. M. Panikkar (John Day, 530 pp., \$7.50). HERBERT LUETHY, who here reports critically on Mr. Panikkar's book, is a steady contributor to COMMENTARY. His most recent appearance was in April of this year with "Fall of Mendès-France's 'Ministry of Hope.'" Mr. Luethy, a Swiss, lives in France at present and his latest book is a study of the current French *impasse*. E. B. Ashton translated the present article.

The history of Asian-European relations over recent centuries is complicated by resentments, by pangs of conscience, by realizations of failure, of troubles caused and injustices done. Hardly any historical work can avoid such things altogether; virtually no one so far has written colonial history without passion and with a clear conscience. With respect to colonialism, Mr. Panikkar's book reveals an admirably open mind such as perhaps only an Indian is capable of at the present moment—and even an Indian would not have been capable of that a few years ago.

The book's open-mindedness derives, moreover, from its very subject, a period of Asian history that, though not long past, is now definitely over. The "Vasco da Gama epoch," the author calls it, the epoch of European penetration and domination that began with Vasco da Gama's landing at Calicut in 1498 and ended with the British withdrawal from India in 1947. In Mr. Panikkar's eyes, these four and a half centuries constitute a great, self-contained entity, and though some of the confusion and ferment left in its wake are still present, one can already look back at that era, he feels, with objectivity and dispassionately. His book itself proves him right.

WE SENSE this new, sovereign detachment toward the past in the chapters in which the author speaks of his own country and its two hundred years under British rule. All the things we know and have read about are in them: the lawlessness and immorality of the British conquest, the unscrupulous game the East India Company played with Indian rulers and religious groups, the commercial and financial exploitation of the Indians, the eco-

conomic havoc wrought by the Manchester type of capitalist expansion. The author expresses his acid contempt for the airs the white lords on the Peacock Throne gave themselves, their witless blustering, their ridiculous displays of "Oriental" pomp. Calcutta's Victoria Memorial—that vulgarly colossal and soulless "imitation Taj Mahal" in white marble, as Mr. Panikkar calls it—remains as a token of the British Raj's inability "to construct in India anything which rivaled the great buildings of the past." And yet, on balance, the sum of Britain's positive accomplishments in India far outweighs all criticism.

Mr. Panikkar makes clear what was not before apparent from the European or even the British point of view: that the empire of India, whose emperor was the king of England, was far more genuinely Indian than the Mogul empire had been. It did not rule one part of India in opposition to the rest, but ruled all of India, carried out all-Indian policies, turned India from a merely geographic concept into a political entity, trained a political, technical, and administrative elite, created a national consciousness, and laid the groundwork for modern statehood and democratic government.

To those theoreticians of "imperialism" who refuse to see in colonialism anything but the search for markets, raw materials, labor to exploit, we recommend the paean of praise to the British-Indian Civil Services that is sung in retrospect by Mr. Panikkar. He speaks of the men who "fought the case of *their* India against the dictates of Whitehall," and of their "open refusal to be influenced by commercial and industrial interests." The author, an Indian nationalist, writes:

"The emergence of India under the British as a powerful state, with an efficient administration, was the work of a bureaucracy, carefully recruited, elaborately organized and maintained with dignity and prestige. . . . India as the country where their career began and ended and as the country they were serving became their exclusive concern. True it was not the India of the Indians, but a special India of their own conception. To that India they developed a sense of loyalty. They visualized it as a country whose millions of inhabitants were entrusted to their care. Thus developed that strange identification of themselves 'with the masses.' . . . There was no alliance between the Civil Service and big business, and the British Indian bureaucracy was not interested

in the exploitation of India. In fact it could legitimately be said that the services championed 'their India,' the India of the dumb masses, against British businessmen and capitalists. . . ."

In a similar vein Mr. Panikkar speaks of the new legal order that Thomas Babington Macaulay, the celebrated essayist and historian, established in India during his term of service there. Within a century the basic principles of this order, which was the equality of all before the law, revolutionized the 2,000-year-old, ossified, religiously buttressed Indian caste system. This:

"In a country where under Hindu doctrine a Brahmin could not be punished on the evidence of a Sudra, and even punishment varied according to caste, and where, according to Muslim law, testimony could not be accepted against a Muslim. . . . Few, indeed, who compare Macaulay's code with its great predecessors, whether those of Manu, Justinian or Napoleon, will cavil at the claim that the Indian penal code was a great improvement. . . . The imposing and truly magnificent legal structure, under which not only 360 million people of India but the millions in Pakistan and Burma have lived during the last 100 years, has changed the basis of society in a manner which few people realize."

And with an optimism whose test has yet to come, Mr. Panikkar adds that while there may be economic and political reversals in Asia, it would be:

". . . difficult to imagine how the basic ideas of the new legal systems could be changed so easily, unless civilization itself is extinguished in these areas. . . . We may therefore assume that the great changes brought about in social relationships by the introduction and acceptance of new legal systems under the influence of Europe will be an abiding factor in the civilization of Asia."

LASTLY, Mr. Panikkar does full justice to the vast educational work done by Britain and British missions, tracing the consequences in the gradual development of a modern all-Indian elite within three generations—from dubious beginnings as "Westernized Oriental gentlemen" to leaders who embodied a genuine amalgamation of Indian and Western culture. Yet he stresses the difference between the dream of the sowers and the outcome of the seed: it turned out to be not Anglicization or Europeani-

zation, much less Christianization, but a reform and revival of Hinduism. Without directly admitting it, Mr. Panikkar gives us to understand that, on the whole, the gradual establishment of self-governing bodies in India under the British kept pace with the evolution of this Indian elite, if not with its impatience to replace their foreign masters.

Lord Macaulay's all-Indian system of English-language education, says Mr. Panikkar, "gave to India a common language for political thinking and action . . . a community of thought, feeling and ideas which created the Indian nationality. The mind of India is united spiritually by Hindu religious thought, by the binding force of the great tradition which Sanskrit embodies . . . and by the new community of ideas and approach which English education has spread among the dominant classes." Without it, Hinduism would not be unified today, but "split into as many different units as there are languages in India, and would have repeated the pattern of Europe with its conglomeration of mutually hostile units within the same Christian community." This defense of the English educational system—today threatened in its foundations by neo-Indian linguistic nationalism—as a unifying agent of the many-tongued Indian state is chiefly addressed to Mr. Panikkar's own countrymen, but the warning example that he sets before them can be taken to heart by Europeans too.

This British-Indian imperial symbiosis was far more than a merely governmental relationship. Unquestionably, it was one of the greatest colonizing achievements of all time and its full import will become evident perhaps only from a remoter historical perspective. Nor was this symbiosis confined to the Indian sub-continent alone. The policies of the British viceroys were imperial policies on behalf of India, too, and Indian colonists followed where the British flag led from East Africa to the Fiji Islands and as far away as Jamaica and Trinidad. Even today, after the end of British rule in India, many aspects of Empire and Commonwealth policy cannot be understood without grasping this deep and genuine interrelation. For example, Mr. Panikkar's reference to "the large and prosperous Indian trading community in Hong Kong which grew up simultaneously with the British occupation of the island" casts a sudden light on the close coordination of British and Indian policy towards Red China—and even on

Mr. Panikkar's own appointment as the first Indian ambassador to Peking.

WHEN he comes to China Mr. Panikkar sounds a note of rancor and bitterness towards the West that was not heard in his chapters on India. He tells the story of how the dragon's seed of abuse, corruption, and disintegration was sown in China by the Western powers, seed which has since germinated into civil war and Communist revolution. He tells of how cynical and naive hucksters and equally naive, well-meaning, hidebound missionaries undermined the structure of this proud and rotten empire literally stone by stone until it crumbled on their heads. All this Mr. Panikkar tells convincingly and, by and large, correctly. True, many a chapter is too angrily written to be entirely just—notably the long one about Western missionary work in China, and the cut-throat competition between missions of all nations, creeds, and sects, and the opportunistic, often tenuous, but much more often boundlessly naive and maladroit alliances the missionaries made with the agents of forced trade and political interventionism. As recently as twenty years ago, however, there would have been no lack of bright spots in the somber picture. In China, too, enormous amounts of good will and humane purpose were invested in the great mission schools and other Western educational institutions. These produced that whole generation of liberal reformers, including Dr. Sun Yat-sen, on whom China's hopes rested from the first Chinese revolution to the between-wars period. But it was a generation that came too late, was too small, too rootless, too estranged from its own people; that was overwhelmed by disasters which had long been smoldering; that was impotent in the face of the intervention of foreign powers among whom Europe no longer counted.

Mr. Panikkar does not finish that story. A prophet turned backwards, he lets it fade out ominously in the failure and collapse of the liberal, "Western" attempts of the Chinese at reform. The great, bold, tenacious efforts that America, above all, made to give the Chinese Republic technical, organizational, and economic aid, Mr. Panikkar seems unaware of or finds no longer worth mentioning. The final cataclysm thrusts everything, even that which once appeared positive, into shadow.

Yet what the West was doing in and to China in the 19th century should not be

blamed on "colonialism." It was not colonizing, but the very opposite. The European powers—and the United States to some extent—were raiding for the purposes of trade, opening ports and markets by force, and engaging in planless and irresponsible intervention with no other end in view than trade volume. It began with the Opium War, which opened the unfriendly Celestial Empire, heretofore arrogantly isolated, to an outside world of which China's masses had never heard and that even her governing officials viewed as filled with barbarian tribes unworthy of attention—"the chieftainness of the tribe," Imperial Commissioner Lin called the Queen of England as late as 1842. Once gunboats and marines had ended what Mr. Panikkar himself describes as the "humiliating" and "intolerable" treatment of foreign merchants, and given them a blustering self-confidence, the history of Sino-European relations became a horrible game of pinpricks and reprisals, sluggish revolts and blind punitive operations. China was and remained a great sovereign state. Preservation of her sovereignty and "integrity" for the sake of an international balance of power was a fundamental dogma of Western diplomacy—as it was in the case of the Ottoman Empire until 1914. But China's inner stability and welfare were nobody's business. No one was responsible for her viability—no one but the "ignorant, corrupt, and unscrupulous woman" who occupied the throne for the last half century of the Manchu empire's existence.

CHINA's initial situation vis-à-vis the West is in no way comparable to India's. Rather to Japan's. Japan was likewise forced by warships to open her ports after centuries of hermetic seclusion, and a comparison of the course of recent Chinese and Japanese history would do more to clarify the nature of the Chinese tragedy in the century of the "Open Door" than would artificial and superficial parallels with India. China never had India's chance. Unlike Japan, on the other hand, she could rely on neither her political tradition nor her religious spirit—the latter being by then attenuated to mere ritual and a Confucian wisdom that in the final analysis was somewhat asthmatic, and clever rather than profound—to give her the strength to meet the challenge of the "foreign influences" pouring in on her, whether to receive them, utilize them, or excrete them.

This is not said in exculpation of the merchant freebooters and gunboat diplomats who for a century fed on this vast, helpless body, without an idea in their heads except the double mirage of an "inexhaustible" Chinese market—400 million prospective customers for cotton socks, ready-made suits, and felt hats!—and 400 million convertible souls. But the more they penetrated China, and the more extra-territorial rights, concessions, and special jurisdictions they got for themselves, their clients, and their converts, the farther the mirage receded. The story of this dream, ever disappointed but never relinquished, the dream of the fabulous China trade, is still worth reading, for under different labels it continues to haunt all Western business brains—one of those ineradicable illusions of which history is so full.

IN HIS conclusion, Panikkar asks what would have been left behind by Europe's incursion into Asia if around 1750—two-and-a-half centuries after Vasco da Gama's arrival—relations between the two continents had suddenly stopped again. The answer is virtually nothing. The ruins of a few small trading posts and coastal forts, a diminishing band of Christians in Japan and on the Malabar coast, a calendar reform in China, and perhaps a footnote in the Chinese chronicles stating that "red-haired" barbarian traders, avid for spices and fabrics but without much to offer in return, had frequented some ports for a while and disappeared again.

This remark clearly divides the "Vasco da Gama epoch" into two unequal parts. The first was the period of the trading post, the great adventure, and—at least with the first Portuguese—the crusading spirit; the second was the period of colonialism. The trading period was immensely fruitful for Europe, spiritually as well as materially: a great enlargement and enrichment of her view of the world, new goods, new uses, new learning, new skills, new art forms, new ideas, legends, and myths came to her from Asia. In exchange, European mercantilism gave Asia nothing and hardly affected her life. The second colonial period, on the other hand, revolutionized the continent of Asia in the course of one or at most two centuries, profoundly changing every aspect of Asian life, from economy to religion, so that a return to Asia's millennial "immutability" is no longer conceivable now.

The transition from mercantilism to colonial-

ism did not occur everywhere, and not everywhere at the same time. Between the unimaginative and inhuman exploitation carried on by the Dutch East India Company in Indonesia (the Indonesians, significantly, adopted Islam as a real "resistance religion" at the very time when the Portuguese and then the Dutch imposed their rule—so that the "Eighth Crusade" was lost by Christendom!) and the colonial activities that began with the French Revolution and the twenty-five-year interlude of British administration, there is a deep and, even more, an abrupt break. In China there never was a transition or break. Until the very end, Europe sought nothing in China but a market for exports. European policy towards China in the 19th century was pure "trade imperialism," with the pressures intensifying, the fire power increasing, and competition multiplying as time went on.

Whenever colonialism came to prevail, it served to check or at least mitigate the chaos resulting from the clash of modern economic practices and technology with archaic social and economic forms. China may well be the sorriest example of the damage that pure, *non-colonial* mercantilism could do in former times. Of all the judgments of history that we tacitly accept today, none stands as much in need of revision as the one on "colonialism."

MR. PANIKKAR knows and loves India and China, and the chapters devoted to them constitute the main part of his book, in space as well as in value. The third Asian country to receive detailed treatment is Japan; here, however, Mr. Panikkar lacks sympathy if not knowledge. The Empire of the Rising Sun is evidently not included in his pan-Asian creed, and it is never quite clear whether he views Japan as really an Asian country or as the "ape of England." He gives all the most important data of modern Japanese history, but this does not help us much towards an understanding of the peculiar fate of this island empire, the baffling mixture of facility and obtuseness that the Japanese exhibit.

The other countries of Asia are mentioned and briefly dealt with largely for the sake of completeness. What lies west of India is not mentioned: the whole Islamic world, Iran, the Middle East, Central Asia—and therefore, unfortunately, the fate of Central Asia under Russian rule goes undiscussed. Absent, too, are the Philippines and, with them, Spanish

colonial power. Mr. Panikkar adheres strictly to that division of the globe between Spain and Portugal established by Pope Alexander VI—even where it was geographically in error—and limits himself to the "Portuguese half," the hemisphere of Vasco da Gama. Spain's successor, the United States, hardly enters his field of observation, and his few remarks about American missions and America's "non-territorial imperialism" indicate neither great insight nor serious study. The "West" whose clash with Asia is the book's subject is Europe alone—something the Indian author, if not the European reader, takes as a matter of course. But this does not make Mr. Panikkar's cursory comments on Southeast Asia and Indonesia, or his sketchy caricatures of European colonial powers other than Britain, very useful either. The giant framework that he proposes for himself in the title of his book is only partly filled in: a few large figures, sharply envisaged and drawn, occupy the center of his great mural while near the edges the contours grow hazy and distorted. This book could be taken almost to prove that "there is no Asia"—that "pan-Asianism" is an empty phrase or, at best, an obscure myth.

What remains is India and China—and that, of course, is a large slice of Asia. India furnishes Mr. Panikkar with his approach, the chronological limits he sets himself, and his terms of reference; China provides the ideological spectacles through which she, and everything else, is seen. The result is a kind of schizophrenia that may be characteristic of a whole intellectual and political elite in India today. When writing about his own country, whose history he has explored in other major works, and with whose problems he is thoroughly familiar as a politician, diplomat, and one-time premier of Bikanir, Mr. Panikkar is an outspoken liberal-conservative "Westerner"—as his appraisal of British achievements in India shows. But when he views pan-Asia, Russia, and America from the ideological vantage-point of Peking, his judgment and even his terminology turn "progressive" in the most vapid sense.

THIS becomes most striking in what is probably the weakest and most superficial chapter of his book, the one devoted to Russian expansion in Asia. Reading Mr. Panikkar, we get the impression that Russian imperialism—by which he means not only the Soviet Russian kind but, in line with the neo-patriotism of

current Soviet historiography, the Czarist kind too—has been the most righteous, the most understanding, the most accommodating of all imperialisms. In fact, it is not imperialism at all, but a neighborly relationship. The key witness cited for this view of Russian expansion in Asia—which was not conquest but an "incorporation"—is Owen Lattimore.

As already stated, Central and Western Asia, where Czarist and Soviet "nationality politics" have run the gamut from mere subjugation and rapine to the deportation and extermination of whole peoples, do not even enter Mr. Panikkar's field of vision. He sees Russia exclusively from Peking, and in his picture Russia's relations with Asia are with China alone. It is true that these were mainly confined to the Siberian-Mongolian "vacuum" at the back doors of both empires, and thus productive of only secondary friction in comparison with the conflicts between China and the Western maritime powers. But even so, the difference in yardsticks remains perplexing and, at first glance, incomprehensible. Mr. Panikkar presents the European concessions and settlements on the China coast as a scandal, but the far more voracious way in which the Russians grabbed extra-territorial rights, made annexations, arrogated spheres of influence, and set up satellite states in Chinese Manchuria and Mongolia is depicted as good-neighborly relations. And the French protectorate in Annam, where China had once exercised a shadowy overlordship, is denounced as a flagrant violation of international law—of which the victim was not Annam, but China!

IS THIS incomprehensible? We shall have to try to make it comprehensible. The conclusions in this book carry more weight than its presentations, and they are obviously typical of the state of mind of a whole stratum of politically educated Indians—the most open-minded, most Westernized group in the country, and of whom Nehru is the most conspicuous representative. And what Indian statesmen—not to mention Chinese statesmen—think of Russo-Asian relations counts for more, after all, than what we ourselves think. It seems that any European or American who tries to remind the Indians of Russian imperialism sounds to them like a pickpocket crying "Stop thief!"

Apparently, in the Asian historical consciousness, Russia, the successor state to the Mongol and Tartar empire, has a right to be in Asia,

while Europe has not. That a great territorial state should spread out and overrun its neighbors until it reaches the limits of its power is an unpleasant fact for those neighbors, but it is in accord with what has been going on in Asian history for thousands of years. Empires, annexations, looting and conquering armies of horsemen and foot soldiers, cruel despotisms, avalanches of nomads from the Central Asian steppes and deserts: these have been with Asia as long as her civilized memory extends—and they have all been dreadful in their effects. Meanwhile the way of life of the passive millions of Asia has hardly changed.

But that people should come in ships from distant continents to administer lands whose inhabitants could not even imagine where these invaders came from and how it was all happening; that these invaders, with their completely novel weapons, techniques, customs, and ideas should penetrate ancient societies and slowly force the traditional usages of the latter to yield to new rhythms and organizational forms—this was unheard of, this was an artificial, presumptuous attack on every divine and natural order.

To be ruled by a foreign land power whose borders abut on one's own is infinitely more oppressive than to be ruled by a foreign sea power whose borders are remote. But the land power comes on foot, and is therefore in accord with the course of the world since time immemorial. And in any case, the vicissitudes of territorial conquest have changed little in the lives of the peoples of Asia beyond the names and the nationalities of the masters who exacted tribute and forced labor from them. The landing of Vasco da Gama's flotilla in India was, however, a different matter, starting an irreversible revolution and shattering norms that seemed eternal.

In short, the West had no business in Asia, and its intrusion was a breach of all rules. If we probe the atavistic layers of political consciousness underlying some recent events in Europe, the idea that land rule is legitimate but sea rule unnatural and irregular becomes less unfamiliar. To use a phrase that was in vogue under the Third Reich, the European invaders were "geopolitical strangers" to Asia. The outlook that led Hitler and Stalin to reject the "interference of geopolitical strangers" in their partition of Poland is the same as is expressed today in many Soviet Russian and Communist Chinese manifestoes.

ALTHOUGH he does not put it that way, this is the moral of the story for Mr. Panikkar too. He cannot refrain from quoting Hilaire Belloc in his introduction: "In the final and decisive main duels of history the party which begins with high sea power is defeated by the land power; whether that sea power be called Carthage or Athens or the Phoenician fleet of the Great King, it loses in the long run and the land power wins." And Panikkar draws the conclusion: "Ultimately in Asia also, the land masses asserted themselves against the power based on the sea, and the withdrawal of European power from Asia is in effect a reassertion of the power of land empires shaking themselves free from the shackles of maritime mercantilism."

Of course, the judgment of history is not quite as unequivocal as that. Where are the empires of the Medes and Persians, the Mongols and Tartars, the Arabs and Turks? It is true,

if platitudinous, that empires come and go while the great land masses and their teeming populations remain through all political catastrophes. It is probably likewise true that mass will defeat movement or, rather, that movement will ultimately be absorbed by the inertia of the mass. But it is movement that changes the world. It is the sea empires, those fine, fragile constructions of intellect and technology, that in both ancient and modern history distinguish the periods of movement, wakefulness, and freedom, while the ponderous territorial colossi stand for the old Orient and the European Middle Ages.

In this sense, our time, too, is the epoch of a "revolt of the masses"—the epoch of a counter-revolution. But Asia cannot retrace the steps she has taken under Western rule—that is the optimistic, perhaps too optimistic, conclusion of this Indian historian who writes "period" after the "Vasco da Gama epoch."

A POEM

DEREK MILLER

So Streicher Killed Your Father! How Interesting

I WONDER if, by chance,
When passing by a shop in town,
I'll meet a rabbi's son from France
Who'll sell his beard for half a crown.

Perhaps a Jew in all the places
Forgets the lips of those who died,
Perhaps he'd wink at shriveled faces
And flick a half-crown while he sighed.

I wonder if, by chance,
When meeting *goyim* in the town,
I'll ask Miss Fortescue to dance
And she will pout, and flush—and frown.

DEREK MILLER is a young English poet who was born in Sheffield, in 1929. This is his first appearance in our pages.